

Intergenerational Poverty and Art Therapy as an Intervention Tool

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Author Note

We have no conflict of interest to disclose.

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Abstract

Plan to work on in class and learn more about it the week of November 1st.

Keywords: at-risk youth, inner city poverty, youth, intergenerational poverty, art therapy, low-income families, poverty, addiction in intergenerational poverty, school counseling

INTERGENERATIONAL POVERTY AND ART

Intergenerational Poverty and Art Therapy as an Intervention Tool

Intergenerational poverty is a cycle which remains constant throughout the cycle of life. Effects of intergenerational poverty include alcoholism, a rift in family dynamics, drug addictions, as well as educational decline early as childhood. To break this cycle different intervention methods have been conducted to teach people the skills they need to live their life in a positive and effective manner. Youth especially are affected by the cycle; due to the different effects it brings throughout life. One intervention method that can be used to break this cycle is the use of Art Therapy. Art Therapy can be used as an intervention tool to evolve the social development skills for youth living in an intergenerational poverty cycle.

Intergenerational Poverty

Intergenerational poverty is a cycle that remains the same throughout our world. This term is defined with multiple examples which relate to current and historical educational levels, income, and job securities. Those who have suffered from the intergenerational poverty cycle their education and learning levels have improved, but parenting remains a huge issue today (Smith, 2015). The housing market has issues with pricing and discrimination towards races which continuously keeps families in the cycle remaining in low-income neighborhoods year after year (Owens, 2017). Resources for financial aid are constantly making an impact in these communities. This is because the affordable housing market is scarce. Which means that pricing of homes typically forces low-income families out of most neighborhoods (Owens, 2017, and Smith, 2015).

The Department of Housing and Urban development estimated in 2015, that approximately 12 million households in the United States pay more than fifty percent of their yearly income for housing mortgages and costs. With that being said, the neighborhood

INTERGENERATIONAL POVERTY AND ART

experience and lifestyle can also influence the outcome of a youth's life. These neighborhood conditions for youth play a huge role in the future through economic outcomes. Which eventually affects their own future occupations and lifestyle (Owens, 2017).

With the conditions, drug and alcohol abuse in parents is also a factor which can cause the cycle for youth to remain consistent. Living with drug and alcohol abuse make it easier for youth to fall into those addiction patterns as well. Substance use was hardly considered an issue in the past in relation to intergenerational poverty. Drug and alcohol abuse is only added to this cycle when youth are trying to move out of low-income neighborhoods as adults. States across America have housing assistance for those who are and who have been recovering from substance abuse. Further research needs to be conducted to see if these programs of housing assistance truly help substance abusers and their children (Owens, 2017).

To break this cycle, family members, which are typically grandparents provide a safe space for youth to live and grow between the unstable housing situations they grow up in. Data and research stated that young adults moved between independent living arrangements, and their own parents house while growing up. Low-income families must rely on social networking which include local and homogenous programs for financial hardships (Owens, 2017). Although homelessness is an issue for all populations, children specifically encounter mental health issues, physical health problems, a decrease in academia, and an unknown future (Heise, 2011). Poverty plays a negative affect through development (Duncan et al., 1994), and a decrease on completing high school (Haveman et al., 1991) (Tilahuan, 2021).

Statistics on Intergenerational Poverty

Owens (2017) claims that “72% of black children, compared to only 40% of white children, who grew up in the poorest quarter of neighborhoods remain in these types of

INTERGENERATIONAL POVERTY AND ART

neighborhoods as adults” (p. 401). In the year of 2010, about fifty percent of the families living on fixed incomes lived in poverty rates above twenty percent, ten percent of those households lived in “concentrated poverty” homes with a rate over forty percent (Owens, 2017). According to Leung (2018), “approximately 8.3 million children under 18 years of age lived with at least one parent who abused illicit drugs or alcohol during the past year” (p. 1344). Tilahuan (2021) states, “In 2018 the U.S. Census Bureau estimated the official poverty rate at 11.8% and among children that rate was estimated to be 16.2% (United States Census Bureau, 2019b)” (p. 209). By estimation and surveys, “50% of Americans will have experienced a year in poverty by [the] age [of] 65” (p. 209).

Youth’s social development skills in Intergenerational Poverty

Social development skills are critical for everyone, but especially those living in an intergenerational poverty cycle. Youth who are apart of low-income families can develop “social, or behavioral problems”. These issues are related to learning and attention deficit disorders. Social development decline in children begins much earlier than people realize (Smith, 2013). Smith quotes “Children growing up in low-income families, defined as incomes less than 200 percent of the federal poverty level, enter elementary school about one year behind their peers in vocabulary, general knowledge, early math skills, and pre literacy skills” (p. 66).

As a society, we need to help youth in the intergenerational poverty cycle by increasing their levels of school readiness through early head start programs (Smith, 2013). By increasing the level of academic excellence, it would “equalize employment opportunities and promote upward social mobility for low-income families” (Smith, 2013). These head start programs are funded publicly to help those who were “educationally disadvantaged by family legacies of exclusion, discrimination, wage suppression, and oppression (Vinovskis et. al. 2005)” (Smith,

INTERGENERATIONAL POVERTY AND ART

2013). Smith (2013) also claims, “lower academic achievement disproportionately affects racial and ethnic minorities” (p. 66). Building relationships and social skills youth will be able to solve problems, gain a stronger vocabulary, work on communication skills, and create a bond with each other that creates a sense of purpose. Youth in the intergenerational poverty cycle gain social skills through these early head start programs, and art therapy programs through the use of different opportunities for them to learn from one another and practice interpersonal skills (Goicoechea 2014). Leung (2018) quotes “[youth] develop self-regulatory skills, become more aware of their emotions, and learn to express their emotions in healthy ways” (p. 1345).

Youth Living in Intergenerational Poverty and Art Therapy

Art therapy is an important intervention method for everyone, but especially for those suffering from the intergenerational poverty cycle. To break this cycle multiple different processes of art therapy have been established throughout the United States. These processes include open studio practices, discussion and witnessing, as well as self-expression through different experientials and journal entries.

The open studio practice was developed by a group of art therapist in the City of Chicago in the late 1990s. Sutherland (2010) said the open studio concept was established due to the fact that, “the Illinois Children’s Mental Health Task Force [established in 2003], [stated] [that] 70% to 80% of Chicago Public Schools youth [are] in need of help, [and] do not receive appropriate and necessary mental health services” (p. 69). One of Chicago’s first practices of the open studio process was “Art Therapy Connection. Art Therapy Connection also known as ATC had been found by Judy Sutherland, and one other art therapist as a “non-profit organization”. ATC was established to connect youth with the mental health needs as a way for them to stay in school. Since the opening of the organization over a thousand students have been to this open studio in

INTERGENERATIONAL POVERTY AND ART

the city of Chicago. Sutherland states that she and her co-founder created ATC that met the standards of helping troubled youth with mental health issues, as well as strengthen youth's sense of belonging and the motivation to stay in school. ATC believes in working in the inner-city public-school system of Chicago, especially those that meet standards of being "socioeconomically disadvantaged" in the sense that educational desires of students tend to be a struggle (Sutherland 2010). Sutherland states "of the families living in areas served by ATC, 82.5% to 100% [of the youth] are living in or below the federal poverty threshold" (p. 70). ATC also believes in all cultural differences and strives for the pre-teens to become one big group through "[cooperation] and to create new meaning for their lives without sacrificing their uniqueness as individuals" (Dreikurs et. al 1986).

Art Therapy connection was established to only be a yearlong "in school" art therapy program to help students with little to no access of mental health recourses". ATC works with youth to establish a sense of "self-awareness and self-management skills by integrating art and creativity through therapy" (p.70). To participate in the ATC program youth must have "poor grades, [consistently] [absent] [from school]" as well as being "inattentive and withdrawn, [] sad, defiant, negative, disrespectful, aggressive, [and] attention seeking" (p. 70). With youth having these behaviors therapist speak consistently with their teachers. Speaking with these teachers will help in the long run because it provides "continuity in service for the youth". Providing constant communication between these groups offers the youth a sense of community and safety net of trust (Sutherland, 2010).

Sutherland claims that "[one] ATC philosophy is based on the belief that humans are special beings who are socially motivated, [and] that we are always in the process of becoming and actively creating our own reality" (p. 70). This philosophy is designed to help the youth

INTERGENERATIONAL POVERTY AND ART

relate with one another in a group setting to gain “awareness” of how they interact with others, “whether with family members, friends, teachers, or even strangers”. Sutherland also believes that creating these relationships using art therapy, youth can have a huge difference in their life and over all well-being. These connections youth establish through the art, their “cognitive and social development” increase even when adversity is faced (Sutherland, 2010).

An art directive approach in the ATC program is, “students are encouraged to express their emotions on a wall covered in paper in each of the art therapy rooms” (p. 71). These walls being covered in work the students have a safe space to show what has been troubling them in their current situations (Sutherland, 2010). When creating these walls students “are required to follow four basic rules when drawing on the wall, especially because the wall is not entirely private” (p. 71). The rules are “(a) do not sign your name on or write anyone else’s name, (b) no swear or cuss words, (c) be respectful of other students work, and (d) no gang signs or symbols” (p. 71). Having the wall for the youth, ATC therapist believe it was a great way for students to “minimize and even prevent troublesome behaviors” which they participated in before the program (Sutherland, 2010). Another art directive approach which encourages students socially is “Draw a Road” Draw a Road is where students are to complete a drawing of a road which can best represent oneself “if you were that road”. After completing the drawing of the road youth participated in discussions with a reflection (Sutherland, 2010). These questions were “where is this road coming from?”, “where is this road going?”, “how will you get there?”, “who is going with you?”, “how long will it take”, and “what will you find when you get there” (p. 72). Having participated in this experiential, the youth are able to understand their own self-worth, community engage with one another, understand the metaphorical outlook on their drawings, and

INTERGENERATIONAL POVERTY AND ART

provide “social skills” for themselves which will help them develop to look toward the future (Sutherland, 2010).

Sutherland says, “the second primary goal in the ATC program is to model and teach useful emotional regulation, anger management, and coping skills for real-life problems in order to encourage responsible and positive behavior” (p. 72). Testimonies have been stated about this Open Studio practice. In this program, a 17-year-old male who had been in ninth grade for three years in a row talked about drawing a picture of the mountains. When participating in the program he stated that his biggest issue was reaching the top of the mountain “while flames representing his family problems, and “gangbanging” friends were pulling him down” (p. 72). Talking about this drawing was surprising to the young teen because he did not realize how much his traumas had affected him (Sutherland, 2010). According to Sutherland (2010), “after 2 years in art therapy he no longer uses drugs and recently graduated” (p. 72). Another student participating who had great results of this program was a 12-year-old girl. This 12-year-old girl was referred to ATC due to her lack of attention and sleeping during school (Sutherland, 2010). Her breaking moment in Art Therapy Connection was after she participated in a session where she had drawn a picture of a young girl hiding behind a wall. The young girl had the words labeled scared and mad on the picture to represent the trauma of her father’s alcoholism, and how he climbed into her bed while she was sleeping. This traumatic event caused her and her mother to eventually call the police and leave the home. After participating in art therapy at ATC she was able to talk about her traumas and have a better attention span while in school (Sutherland, 2010). Having these two people speak about their experiences in the program shows the progress of emotion regulation, a huge increase in self-awareness with the ability to adjust to real life situations, speak up about their emotions, and discover positive behaviors (Sutherland,

INTERGENERATIONAL POVERTY AND ART

2010). Sutherland (2010) stated that “ATC art therapist found that approximately 80% of the students consistently attended school, and that nearly 20% of those not at school were ill, truant, suspended, expelled, or transferred out of the district” (p.73).

Client’s background is considered a huge portion and reasoning as to why people in the intergenerational poverty cycle are involved in Art Therapy. According to Potash (2019), “the clients’ socioeconomic situations are compounded by a range of social factors including systemic poverty and racism” (p. 174). Art therapist must have an open mind when paying attention to different backgrounds, and cultures (Potash, 2019). Working with adolescents and youth, Goldner claims art therapist deal with “dramatic, cognitive, emotional, social, and physical changes accompanied by significant alterations in self-representations, and social networks” (p. 25). Recently art therapy has become popular with youth. The popularity relates to creativity, self-expression, and developmental achievements (Goldner, 2018). Youth experiencing the effects of the intergenerational poverty cycle have a challenge when going through the notion of art therapy (Wallace-DiGarbo, 2006). While experiencing the intergenerational poverty cycle, risk factors that youth may take are mental health issues, struggles in school, family issues, psychoactive abuse, and breaking the law (Wallace-DiGarbo, 2006).

Youth who go through these experiences that participate in these art therapy practices typically connect to the unconscious and create something completely different from their reality. This is so they could understand the process of art therapy in its full capacity (Wallace-DiGarbo, 2006). According to Wallace-DiGarbo (2006), “it was hypothesized that the intervention program would improve the participants’ agency in their world as measured by the following dimensions of functioning: (a) family adjustment, (b) psychological adjustment, (c) peer influence, (d) school adjustment, (e) deviancy, and (f) attitude” (p.120). When participating in art

INTERGENERATIONAL POVERTY AND ART

therapy, the process was also taking account towards the idea of youth experiencing community engagement as artist (Wallace-DiGarb, 2006).

The popular studio process was adopted in the year of 1991 and was created for the sole intention to create art and establish community engagement. The Open Studio Process was developed by three well known Artists in the Chicago area (Block, 2005). While spending a year working within the community these artists believed that there was a need for some sort of arts program that would positively impact at-risk youth (Block 2005). Block claims that “according to an Evanston United Way Community assessment report, (United Way of Evanston, 2002) afterschool programming is a great need and is an area of concern” (p.32). This lack of afterschool programming affected young tweens ages ranging from 10 to 12 years old (Block, 2005).

The Open Studio Process has focuses which are intention, art making, witness-writing, discussing the work, and participation which cannot be forced upon students (Block, 2005). These focuses are unique enough for students to help them with their own learning capabilities and understand their stories and traumas (Block, 2005). A primary factor of the Open Studio Process is to help at-risk youth understand the process of creativity and the versatile use of art making as an outlet for self-expression. Weekly for nine to twelve weeks out of the year, a certain group of students meet up to express their stories in an art therapy group (Block, 2005). These students can free themselves from their communities, homelife, and develop their own stories using images and or other creative art processes (Block, 2005). According to Block (2005), the Open Studio Process “is a space where it is okay to get paint on the walls and floor, it is a safe open place to be creative” (p. 33). When looking at their own artworks and progress, the witnessing and discussing of the artwork allowed the youth to be non-judgmental with one

INTERGENERATIONAL POVERTY AND ART

another, as well as helping them see a story being developed behind someone who was experiencing similar life situations (Block, 2005). Not only is witnessing, and creating and important process behind the OSP, art therapist, and mentors create alongside the participants in an artist-in-residence model. There is absolutely no critiquing or commenting on anyone's artwork while in the studio (Block, 2005). This process adopted by the open studio practice model provides a positive yet meaningful way for youth to understand their own life stories, as well as issues along with the story which can eventually be an answer and or call for help down the road (Block, 2005). The open studio process is flexible to help with different types of populations and works to empower everyone in all sorts of socioeconomic backgrounds (Block, 2005).

Working with at risk youth with the use of the Open Studio Process resulted in the artist creating a sense of self-esteem. Gaining this confidence gave the youth the opportunity to be seen and heard as well as appreciated by their peers, family, and other people in their communities (Block, 2005). At risk youth typically receive attention in other forms resulting from problems and or difficult issues they may be experiencing. Working in the open studio process gives these youth the option to receive attention as an artist rather than an at-risk youth (Block, 2005). Typically, the open studio process is well known for troubled tweens who are from a difficult background, and violent environments. Coming from these different background experiences, and environments, the open studio process is helpful to youth who have difficulty expressing emotions in any way (Block, 2005). When in the open studio, the young teens participating have the safe space to explore as well as reveal their stories at their own pace. Typically, when expressing and telling their stories, adolescents have the tendency to express to the world how screwed up it is (Block, 2005). Using the open studio process Block (2005), states

INTERGENERATIONAL POVERTY AND ART

“Art therapy in a social action context combines art and therapy with a commitment to social responsibility” (p.37).

Art Therapy Interventions

Art is a method for people of all ages to tell a story and establish a meaning when working in groups or alone. Creating art is a form of communication that can be effective yet meaningful (Heise, 2011). Using different social and cultural practices can be based on community outreach programs, while understanding relationships between art and reality (Heise, 2011). Heise (2011), claims that the “social activist approach to community art [is used in] art education to address the community” (p. 326). While creating art, pre-teens can explore the differences of verbal and nonverbal expression when in a therapeutic setting (Lindo, 2020). Expressive arts therapies are beneficial since it provides different methods of communication, and the art connects to the unconscious which eventually surfaces to a level that can be eventually discussed (Perryman, 2015). When connecting to the unconscious and having these discussions according to Perryman (2015), “art therapy groups can become a place to work through disconnections and form new social connections in a way that promotes self-growth” (p. 208).

Having art therapy as an intervention tool can be used as a therapeutic approach to decrease mental health issues, and traumas (Losinski, 2016). Art therapy can be used in many different intervention methods. Few examples are, helping tweens who suffer from incompetent social skills, implemented in lower socioeconomic schools to incorporate an increase in learning, promote active approaches to counseling, and help students suffering from anxiety focusing in on self-confidence and awareness (Losinski, 2016). Using art therapy to help at-risked youth can

INTERGENERATIONAL POVERTY AND ART

help increase a sense of resilience, have an increase in the classroom at school, and produce a decrease in dropping out of school (Losinski, 2016).

Typically, art therapy is used as an intervention method which is combined into a larger issue dealing with cognitive-behavioral interventions such as scheduling, and or pleasant activities. This intervention method can be a support system for youth with any sort of mental health issues (Losinski, 2016). Losinski (2016) claims, “increasing the frequency of pleasant activities and positive interactions with the environment can result in significant improvement in depressive symptoms” (p. 27). When working with young teens, experiencing trauma, or have gone through a traumatic event, therapist can use art therapy to help the client process (Losinski, 2016). Art therapy can be used as an approach for children and tweens because it gives them the opportunity to explore and create certain feelings, and thoughts without talking, and or consequences of the trauma involved (Losinski, 2016). When using art therapy as an intervention tool, the main concept is not evaluating the product of the art, instead it is focusing on the therapeutic process behind the creation of the work, and self-expression for the client (Lindo, 2020). Through the process of both talking, and creative interactions with clients, using the creative process of self-expression in a therapeutic approach helps youth form a sense of expression through verbal and nonverbal communication (Lindo, 2020).

Youth and Art Programs

All art programs incorporate the techniques of form, meaning, and value when determining the creative process behind the meaning of the piece. At any age group it is a huge factor to understand the conceptual meaning behind art, but specifically age groups which are being taught art in diverse settings (Heise, 2011). Over the course of the past twenty years counseling practitioners have increased their research on expressive art techniques and different

INTERGENERATIONAL POVERTY AND ART

interventions with all populations (Lindo, 2020). Specifically, youth have become a huge part of this research to increase the learning of expressive art techniques. According to research, counselors have found that youth who are faced with adversity or the struggles of everyday life typically turn to expressive arts as a coping mechanism (Perryman, 2015).

Having community art programs for youth is very impactful, especially those at risk since they are suffering from trauma such as intergenerational poverty, or exposure to traumatic events (Heise, 2011). A study was created to help youth suffering from these events. In this program, the focus was to provide children with exploration of art materials in a positive manner. The youth in this study were a part of the homeless population in an emergency homeless shelter in the southeastern United States. Within the homeless shelter a six-week program was established to help the children and mothers have a purpose and sense of community (Heise, 2011). Heise (2011) states, “participants [ranged from] five to thirteen years old” [and were paired] in groups from ages five to eight and nine to thirteen” (p. 326). Many of the children participating in the art program suffered from violence, neglect, and abuse from their families, and the environment around them (Heise, 2011).

When conducting the study, Heise recorded the responses of the youth’s verbal and nonverbal responses to the art making process. The art program had a curriculum which used the process of individualization and collective approaches to understand the process of protection, dependency on oneself, and establishing a personal narrative (Heise, 2011). When guiding and facilitating these sessions a guide was established to help the youth understand their personal narrative, and creative process (Heise, 2011). The questions asked by Heise (2011) included “Who am I? Who can we be? What makes us strong?; What protects us?; and Who are we?” (p. 327).

INTERGENERATIONAL POVERTY AND ART

Results of Heise's study showed the using these questions and art materials given, the diverse answers from the youth were encouraging and gave them all a sense of voice. When participating in these art programs the homeless youth created their own visual story which represented their life. These stories were used through the method of two-dimensional, and three-dimensional works through cutting and creating shapes with foam material, clay works, and sculpted environments (Heise, 2011).

Developing these creations, three characteristics had become a common theme within each of the homeless youth's artwork. According to Heise (2011), these themes were "physical signs of engagement, art creation and pride in these activities, and positive attitude" (p. 328). As a result, the program in the homeless shelter showed a need in the community for academic success, community engagement, a nurturing environment, and a place for youth to express themselves and tell their story in a safe, and reliable place.

Another group study was performed for at risked African American youth ages 7-12 using the expressive arts therapy as a coping method. These youth came from the homes of parents who suffered from drug and alcohol addictions. The tweens participated in the study for eight weeks in total and studied different art activities which were culturally based on their own race. Examples of these expressive art activities included mask making, storytelling, and African dance (Goicoechea, 2014). During the meeting which took place for a total of eight weeks, each group met for a 2-hour basis typically after school in a community center in the heart of the inner city in an urban neighborhood. When participating in these meetings self-expression, self-worth, coping mechanisms and communication techniques were developed as a result for the growth in these pre-teens. According to Gociochea (2014), "children tend to be more at ease when creating something, expressive interventions also facilitate rapport" (p.69).

INTERGENERATIONAL POVERTY AND ART

To portray the success for youth in art programs, a study was established. *The Evaluation of a Colorful Life* a study by Leung was based off Lev-Wiesel and Liraz's study from 2007. This study showed that drawings created a sense of a better narrative for children ages 9-12 to understand the effects behind the trauma at home suffering from fathers who were addicted to drugs. These drawings overall helped the pre-teens reveal their emotions and feelings towards their home life (Leung, 2018). The study by Leung was developed for preteens and parents suffering from addiction in the city of Hong Kong. The expressive arts therapy approach was to help the youth and parents discover the effects of youth development in a more positive outlook (Leung, 2018). Using art therapy and other forms of art programs the parents who suffered from addictions were able to express their own emotions and talk about their own experiences with their children. Having the parents participate in this study was also important so that the therapist could help provide parenting approaches to help support and uplift their adolescents (Leung, 2018). Results from this study showed that after participating in the art therapy sessions parents changed their beliefs towards their children and started to redirect their parenting skills, while children started to understand the meaning behind their parent's addiction (Leung, 2018).

Another method for youth in art programs that could be beneficial is incorporating art breaks into any method of clinical counseling and or therapy. The use of these art breaks is to help youth understand the concepts and approaches of positive psychology, creating art, and intervention methods for cognitive behavioral issues (Losinski, 2016). Using these art breaks, youth can create visual art projects like mandalas, simple or complex drawings and paintings. Creating these visual art works can overall help the youth's creative mindset, and self-expression (Losinski, 2016).

INTERGENERATIONAL POVERTY AND ART

Conclusion:

Plan to write the conclusion during a writing lab workshop during the week of November 1st, along with the abstract section of the paper.

INTERGENERATIONAL POVERTY AND ART

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INTERGENERATIONAL POVERTY AND ART

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